

Long-term care hospitals: continuing research and policy analysis

ISSUE: What role do long-term care hospitals (LTCHs) play in providing acute and post-acute care? How are clinically similar patients treated in areas without LTCHs? How do Medicare payments and outcomes compare for patients who use LTCHs versus other settings? How can we better define LTCHs and the patients appropriate for them.

KEY POINTS: This presentation synthesizes findings from MedPAC's qualitative and quantitative study of LTCHs to answer research questions about LTCHs' role, how patients are treated in areas without LTCHs, and how Medicare spending and outcomes compare for patients who use these facilities and alternatives. Our study included:

- Thirty-four structured interviews with physicians, hospital administrators, nurses, and discharge planners in two market areas with and two market areas without long-term care hospitals
- Commissioner and staff site visits to long-term care hospitals in three cities with multiple LTCHs
- Quantitative analyses that included market level analyses to compare characteristics of patients treated in markets with and without LTCHS and patient-level analyses to examine the impact of LTCH use on Medicare spending and outcomes

To ensure that Medicare is a prudent purchaser, it may be necessary to adopt criteria that would delineate the types of patients who are appropriately treated in this setting. Rapid growth in the number of LTCHs and the costliness of this care makes it imperative that patients treated in LTCHs are medically complex and much less likely to be treated in other less intensive (and lower-cost) settings.

ACTION: Commissioners will discuss draft recommendations.

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